

# Analysis first step in cleanup of harbor

*Businesses, the Port and Portland have negotiated an agreement on studying the Willamette River Superfund site*

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Negotiators for 10 companies, the city of Portland and the Port of Portland have agreed to fund an analysis of exactly what pollutants lurk in river sediments in the Portland harbor Superfund site and what threats they pose for people and wildlife.

The draft agreement has not been signed by top executives of the companies or by Port or city officials. But the 49-page consent order is the most significant step so far toward cleanup of the Portland harbor. It signals a willingness by the 10 firms, which have conducted business in the harbor, to be involved in what will be a massive, multiyear cleanup.

"We're now under way," said Portland Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who said he intends to sign the document on behalf of Portland. "This is the right thing to do for a city that portrays itself as being on top of environmental issues."

Characterizing the pollutants in the sediments of Portland harbor and determining the risks of cleanup will cost millions of dollars and take two years or more. Only after that study is complete will cleanup begin. Full cleanup could cost tens of millions of dollars and take an unknown amount of time.

The harbor was put on the federal list

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of the nation's most contaminated sites in late 2000.

The unsigned agreement required eight months of negotiation and does not stipulate how much the study will cost. But it calls for the companies, the Port and the city to finance and complete it under the supervision of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Portland would pay for 25 percent of the work. The city has committed \$850,000 toward the study this year.

The EPA targeted the Willamette River between Swan and Sauvie islands as a possible Superfund site after sediment tests in 1997 found high levels of pesticides, heavy metals, tars, mercury and arsenic. Several species of salmon and steelhead protected by the

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federal Endangered Species Act migrate through the area. Some people eat fish taken from the harbor. And six tribes, including the Warm Springs, Yakama and Umatilla, have a say in the cleanup because the Superfund site includes traditional salmon fishing sites.

Wallace Reid, the Superfund project coordinator for the EPA in Seattle, said he was pleased that the negotiated agreement had been reached and hoped it would be signed by top executives of the companies and by Port and city officials.

"I think this is one of the best agreements that the EPA has ever negotiated," he said. "It's good for the tribes, it's good for the Endangered Species Act, it's good for the companies and it's good for the economy of the Portland area."

The 10 companies are members of the Lower Willamette Group, a voluntary consortium convened by the Port to investigate pollution of the Portland harbor and begin cleanup work.

One of the companies, NW Natural, said Monday that it is still reviewing the consent order but in-

tends to sign it. "We're committed to ensuring that testing and cleanup move forward," said Steve Sechrist, a spokesman for NW Natural.

The EPA has not begun an investigation to determine who is responsible for the pollution. None of the 10 firms underwriting the assessment has been implicated in polluting, and many more firms than are represented in the assessment could be held responsible for cleanup costs.

The Superfund law says that whoever is found responsible for contaminating a Superfund site is responsible for the cost of cleanup.

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